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SUBJECT: UNHCR COACHES COLMIL IN PROTECTING CIVILIANS

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Summary  
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[¶1.](#) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is offering nationwide workshops with Colombian military and police to reinforce awareness of their duty to protect civilians and avert displacement. The seminars present core principles of humanitarian law, followed by discussion on how security forces should (or should not) treat civilians, and conclude with a case study simulating real-life conflict situations. The UNHCR says Colombia's human rights framework is world class, but the grass-roots training is needed to address gaps in implementation. End Summary.

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Grass-Roots Guidance on IDPs  
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[¶2.](#) The UNHCR has begun a series of workshops with Colombian military and police to familiarize them with their duty to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs) and avert displacement. With the support of the Defense Ministry and Armed Service chiefs, 38 half-day seminars led by UNHCR's Deputy Director Roberto Mignone are scheduled for the first half of 2008 in hotspots where violence and displacement far exceed national averages. Three sessions have been held to date in San Jose (Guaviare), and Granada and Villavicencio (Meta). Others are planned for Antioquia, Norte del Santander, Narino, and Putumayo departments, among others. The Army is the main audience, but the Marines and Police are also included. Mignone says Colombia is a world role model in its IDP related laws and policies, but there remains much room for improvement in implementation. The UNHCR has previously advised the GOC on policy, but is for the first time providing direct field training.

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Core Precepts, and Case Study  
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[¶3.](#) The workshops include an opening presentation of core principles of humanitarian law, followed by a question and answer dialogue on how security forces should (or should not) treat civilians -- e.g. executing operations so as to minimize collateral damage, pre-stocking supplies when displacement is foreseen, providing special attention to Afro-Colombians and indigenous, not involving civilians in the conflict, and not employing children as informers. A primary goal is to avoid stigmatization of the population in

areas of FARC concentration. In one session, a participant said all families in some areas are suspect since each gave a son to the FARC. Mignone said this made the families victims, not collaborators. He added that forced FARC recruitment is a primary cause of displacement. The session culminates in a case study scenario that raises 40 specific questions involving civilian protection.

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UNHCR: Lessons Learned  
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14. Mignone said the first three seminars confirmed the need for more of this type of training. Only two of the 240 participants were aware of Defense Ministry directives on civilian protection, showing the Ministry's policies are not being absorbed by forces in the field. This may reflect the rapid expansion of the security forces over the last five years, and highlights the need for continued training to help the military internalize human rights standards. UNHCR seminars, complementary to and coordinated with field trainings by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), should help overcome gaps at the grass roots. Mignone hopes the workshops will also help his local offices to find a more open reception when contacting military units on protection issues.

Brownfield